

The Helsinki School Perspective

Miklos Gaál | Ilkka Halso | Nanna Hänninen | Janne Lehtinen | Anni Leppälä | Niko Luoma | Mikko Sinervo | Ea Vasko

Exhibition: 1 July – 9 September 2023

Opening: Friday, 30 June 2023, 6 – 8 pm

Anni Leppälä,
Garden, 2007
62 x 82 cm



Persons Projects warmly welcomes you to our summer exhibition: *The Helsinki School Perspective*. The show is presented in both gallery spaces Lindenstr. 34 and 35, featuring a selection of artists, all of whom had pivotal roles in the beginning of the Helsinki School. The exhibition is dedicated to the historical aspect, exploring how these artists use the photographic processes as a voice for abstraction and a tool for interpreting their emotional landscapes. The Helsinki School platform was created by Timothy Persons in the 1990s, who became inspired by his experience with the Open Studio Concept that was popular during his graduate studies in the mid-1970s in Southern California. It grew to become the most extended sustainable educational platform of its kind consisting of six generations of selected MA students originating from the University of Art and Design, Helsinki, Finland. There are now more than 180 monogram books and 6 volumes of the Helsinki School book that have evolved from this program. This exhibition is curated to reintroduce a new perspective on the conceptual roots that built The Helsinki School.

In Part 1, we experience four different approaches to how these selected artists use the photographic process to abstract a moment in time, the passage of a day, a memory of a specific place, or the interpretation of a historical painting.

Niko Luoma draws upon art history to find subjects for his reinterpretations. His choices range from Jacques-Louis David, through Marcel Duchamp and Pablo Picasso, to Francis Bacon in his series, *Adaptations*. Using his unique photographic practice, he abstracts these iconic images to produce something entirely new. The idea is not to duplicate the original but to interpret it in the spirit of how it was conceived. His image grow from the inside out, as the outcome tends to be spontaneous and unknown. His work is all about light as it touches the film, the exposure becomes his dance, revealing the music from which he is inspired. These photographs represent 20 years of Luoma's experimentations with light as his silent voice.

Reflections of the Ever-Changing (The Short History of Now) is Ea Vasko's series documenting the bustling nightlife of cities through photographing the close up reflections of fleeting movement of lights. These works explore a city spaces ability to constantly change and move, as natural light turns to dark, the artificial light of surrounding areas begin to flicker on as life continues. A reflection has the ability to gather the light surrounding it into one abstract picture on a surface. Vasko compares these reflections to momentary experiences: The experience of now is fresh, abstract and still apart from the logical timeline of history that we tend to build in our heads. The unpredictability of now can be seen in the photographed reflection; nothing is definable, yet, it is just ephemeral sighting. The reflection is captured in a photograph, but like all movement within an ever-changing world, it cannot be held in one place. Whatever was once captured has already moved on.

For Mikko Sinervo landscape is a space of emotion. In his photographs, various landscapes are combined and assembled into a single image, blending these different images together to create up a personal representation of the surrounding space. Sinervo's landscape photographs layer like sediment, as photographs consist of layers of time and space. The results of his

manipulations seem recognisable as such but not identifiable as a specific place. Presented at times in diptychs or triptychs, Sinervo suggests that his work be read as if one were traveling through a landscape.

Nanna Hänninen's *The New Landscapes* series follows her sociological interest in the individual who senses, understands, and places herself in the outside world. These photographs become concentrated narrations of the moment the large colour abstractions have a profound significance of the surrounding reality as they are light moving through space. These urban landscapes are drawings of her body movements that are captured on photographic material as rhythmic lines of light where the subject and the scenery melt into a single image. These pictorial motifs are divided into two different levels, the abstract and the actual, merging the human presence (breathing, heartbeat, laughter, talking, and walking during the time of exposure) into a photographic media that more closely resembles a painting.

Part 2 presents four other approaches, artists who form a unique image that transcends how we interpret our personal, social, and ecological landscape seeing through a Nordic approach to nature.

The photographs of Anni Leppälä seem to be an attempt to fix life's past moments onto a picture. In enchanted sceneries, she reveals the traces of the past, having been covered underneath numerous time layers to retain the ephemeral. Small details like loose buttons in a drawer and a stain on a shirt conduce to the absence. Leppälä's still-life remain as vague indications for obliterating memories, capturing the fragments of transitory moments. In her sensitive compositions, she creates indications of memories in which one can perceive moments of its own past. "My interest in photography is closely related to time in the past tense, to the possibility of being able to make a moment motionless, to make something stand still", states the artist.

Janne Lehtinen has exercised an extremely personal approach in reflecting upon his life, documenting how he is continuously evolving both as an artist and as a person: Lehtinen uses life as his basic contextual material for self-reflections, his photographs become a means for projecting his attitudes toward life. He fuses a Fluxus mentality with the Nordic sense of stoicism. Lehtinen is a storyteller. In his *Where the Earth Ends* series Lehtinen chose locations that best served as a stage for performance. Playing with the elements of wind, light, water, with the diversity of landscapes, and accessories taken from everyday life, he has constructed a narrative that is both poetic and absurd. In his photographs, he retraces the experience thus lived and shares with us his vision of the crossed landscapes.

Miklos Gaál's photographic landscapes, or urban views, are usually taken from distant and elevated viewpoints resulting in his works being characterised by an illogical distribution of blurred and sharp zones within the picture. This mixture of in-focus and out-of-focus areas lends the photographs an unreal quality, like toy worlds or mock decors. To achieve this effect, Gaál manipulates the film plate within the camera. His method is partly random, he can never predict exactly how the pictures will appear in the end. Gaál has been using this method of image manipulation for almost twenty years, transforming the real into something unknown and strange, the viewer cannot help but study the image and question. He comments on his work: "The photographic blur arouses my interest because it shows reality in a new way. The blur prevents the viewer from getting the full view of the picture at once. I am interested in showing something familiar in a new, unfamiliar, even uncanny way."

Throughout his career, Ilkka Halso has focused his photography on protecting, restoring, and understanding the anatomy of nature. His photographs beginning back in the year 2000, have visually explored how we as a culture must develop new approaches to perceiving as well as re-evaluating the natural resources we so commonly take for granted. Halso builds structures by himself, either physically or digitally in his studio, to protect the lakes, rivers and forests, not only from man-made pollution but from our direct misuse of precious resources. The artist states, "when putting nature into a museum, you have to take into consideration the aspect of the audience/consumer. Nature becomes a joyride for tourists or a beautiful landscape turns into a meditative theatre show."